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James Stewart Interview, September 16, 2006

James Stewart

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Oral History 416-03

Badger Two Medicine Oral History

Interviewer: David Brooks

Interviewee: Jim Stewart

September 16, 2006

David Brooks: It's September 16, 2006 and I'm David Brooks doing interviews for the Badger Two Medicine Oral History project. I'm talking today with Jim Stewart here at the Rising Wolf Ranch. Jim I was hoping you could start out by just talking a little bit about where this place is, the size of it, geography of it in the Badger Two Medicine.

Jim Stewart: Where we're located is on the South Fork of the Two Medicine River. We're about four to five miles east of Marias Pass, about seven miles west of East Glacier. We are one of about a dozen homesteads along Highway 2.

DB: What's the size of this ranch here?

JS: This is the same size of all the homesteads unless they were grouped together, which is just about 160 acres. When you drove into the place, you came through the Marquette Ranch owned by Dorothy Marquette and her sons. They reside in Texas.

DB: We were just over in what is the original Rising Wolf Ranch and you were sort of telling me the history of that.

JS: Yes I'll give you a- Larry Epstein printed out all of the owners, the patent numbers from the time that it was a homestead in the early twenties. I'll pass that on to you. I bought the place in 1990. At that time, it consisted primarily of a main lodge, an ice house that you're standing in, which I converted to a workshop. A laundry room is part of the original buildings. There was a horse barn.

The '64 flood took out a number of the buildings including a very nice bar and two other log homes. Those were all built by the Neery(?) family. They are the originators of Rising Wolf Guest Ranch. That work was done around '26 to '28. It was the true dude ranch at that time. Fortunately over the years, people have given me more bits of history that are rather interesting. They had a brochure and a cowboy songbook, which I have.

The brochure was- quite eloquent in the last chance to see the old West. People came in, got off at the Rising Wolf Train Station which is essentially across the road, the other side of Highway 2. They were greeted. Most of their energies were spent fishing, horseback riding, and in the rodeo arena. They continued with the successful ranch into World War Two at the end of the thirties, early forties and they stopped.

Dale and May Pierce(?) bought the place at about 1950. Again, we can get those accurate dates. They ran it as kind of an outfitter, guest ranch affair. May Pierce died a few years ago. Her children brought her ashes out here and they filled me in on a little bit of this period of time when the Pierce family had it. The Pierce family sold it to the Haynes(?) family, people from Montana, teachers out of Minnesota.

They ran a language camp. They ran that camp for about five years when the '64 flood hit. That, of course, devastated the place. They rebuilt it, put a new building up here that we can choose to call the 'ranch house.' The Haynes family actually lived here year-round for a while. As did the Pierce family. The Pierce family had a caretaker by the name of Quibby(?) who filled me in on an interesting piece of information. In the fifties they lived here all winter, early fifties. Her dad, pretty primitive log cabin. No insulation, just a fire.

Her dad would wake them up in the morning and put them on a sleigh and take them out the Highway 2 on a horse sleigh. Put them on the bus and sent them out to East Glacier school. It's quite rough here in the winter time. Fifty below is not unusual and big winds. Survival up here all winter long was quite a task. The people that did do that, like the Haynes and Pierce, they

seemed to have fond memories of the location and solitude. The Haynes family continued until the '75 flood hit.

They gave up on the property. It was bought by an unusual character by the name of Christopher Dunkle(?), actually an English citizen. Chris lived here from '76 and sold the place in 1990 to me. During that period of time, Chris became friends with John Brekke, who runs the Wilderness Treatment Center. The Wilderness Treatment Center is the center for teenage boys that use drugs.

Their program, which is based out of Marion, Montana utilizes this location for their winter operation. It's kind of an outward bound program. They base out of here all winter. They base for their trip, which is part of their 60 day program. They're all over the Badger Two Medicine during the winter, do trail work in the Bob Marshall during the summer. I've converted the place into not really a dude ranch, but a guest ranch.

We lease it by week to family, corporate, photography group, art group. We start taking people in about the middle of June and it comes to a halt usually about the first or second week of September. It's not really any kind of a money-making operation. It's a joy to be here. I'd like to rebuild the place. The entire 165 acres was donated to the Nature Conservancy last year. This ground cannot be developed any further than what it is right now.

DB: What were some of the uses of it going back the years? The original homesteaders? You know you had a photo in there of them on horses. I assume they kept horses on the place?

JS: They had a full blown dude ranch. They had horses, guides. It was truly Rising Wolf Guest/Dude Ranch. The people that originally had the homestead we'll pull that name for you. I think their name was Patton. The Neery family, as I told you, had a dude operation until the forties. They were particularly involved with the rationing board. They sold it to the Pierce family. I don't know if that answered your question.

DB: Yes. They were keeping horses out here, but it wasn't- not a lot of cattle. When you say dude ranch was it just for people to come...

JS: There wasn't enough grazing along any of these to have much cattle.

DB: Were there ever sheep in here? I know there were sheep towards Heart Butte in that area.

JS: If there were sheep I'm not aware. I don't think any of the homestead property had sheep. Maybe in the past years. I think more than likely you'll find that on the reservation.

DB: When we were at the lodge earlier, you mentioned that there was polo grounds here?

JS: There was a full blown rodeo arena with a polo ground. They played polo. I've still got the mallets.

DB: But that was washed away in the '64 flood?

JS: All the buildings went down in the '64 flood except for that. That one was sagging pretty bad. I started to rebuild that in 1991. I've (unintelligible) years. I dug the foundation out, jacked up the building. There were some massive rebuilds. This building that's up here- after the Haynes family were running their language camp, they had all these students coming in. So they very hastily put up what we used to call 'the plywood palace.' It was nothing but bedrooms and a couple of bathrooms. Then they insulated it and they lived there for several winters.

DB: What sort of language school?

JS: From what I understand it was a combination of French and English.

DB: Where would students come from?

JS: As far as I know, they came from- it was an accredited college course. I think they came from all over the United States. Mrs. Haynes and I visited before she died on several occasions. I think there was a very successful program. They had a lot of fun. They certainly were a significant part of this portion, if you want to call it the Badger Two Medicine.

DB: It definitely seems like from talking with other folks that World War Two was the time to change a lot here in terms of dude ranches sort of dried up to some degree. There were a lot of these ranches sold around that time. You started seeing all current uses, more guest ranch type things.

JS: I think there's probably tied to the park. If you check your park history, I think that's about the time that it started to fade out and I don't think it ever really got going full bore again with courses and chalets. I can't give you those specific dates but I think if I guess, it was around that time.

DB: As far as you know, has this ever been logged or has there been much cutting on the property either for building here.

JS: If you go out- let's see, two to three miles, no not even that far, a mile and a half or two miles west, you come to an area called Saw Mill Flats. I've got to assume that that was logged. It was a road coming in all the way from Highway 2. Certainly they did a lot of logging. Also, I've started doing thinning on the property. David Jones kind of a premier forester for the state of Montana came out and looked at the trees. He said that they were about 75 years old, which ties into that picture that you saw on the wall that showed the Neerys and the Potts family. All of the area was burned. So I've got to assume that all of this area was burned, logged and burned in the early Twenties.

DB: Well there was the 1910 fire that sounds like it burned quite a bit of this area as well as a lot of Montana.

JS: It might have been the same one.

DB: And then subsequently logged. That certainly had been the story in a lot of places around here. You logged the standing dead. Firewood and building. So you bought the place in 1990. Had you been out here before in association with the area?

JS: I backpacked Glacier Park a lot. I was in the hunting and fishing business. I had some extra money. Something interesting that you can add to your history- a lot of these places didn't have easements. They were assumed. This piece of property didn't have an easement. That probably is how I was able to acquire the property.

It was actually sold to someone else at a much higher price. The deal fell through because they didn't have an easement. This best friend of mine that runs the treatment center was influential in trying to find somebody that would be sympathetic to the treatment center where he could keep his operation going during the winter. So I happened to have enough cash and the county (?) at that time was James Nelson who's a Supreme Court judge for Montana. He helped me make friends with the Marquette family.

I bought it without an easement. The Marquette family got to know me and my family. They were nice enough to grant me an easement through their property. I might have been able to go to court according to Nelson. Odds are that I would have gotten an easement, but you never know. A number of these properties are tied with rightaways and easements one through another one. They were just assumed that you had a right to go to your property. I do it to an extent.

DB: Is that the only road in and out of here?

JS: Yes.

DB: Is that the only one that's ever been that you know?

JS: Well there's been some other bridges that went down the river. There's only one road. It actually comes in from a Forest Service easement. Until you hit that green gate, you are on

Forest Service property. When you hit the gate then you are on the Marquette family. Then when you went through the second gate you were on Rising Wolf property.

DB: So you know I mentioned that there were trucks up there at the gate that said that they were bow hunters. Where are they heading? Are they cutting across private property or is there a trail into the forest?

JS: No there was a legitimate easement back into the Badger Two Medicine. That's where they're undoubtedly hunting; Hide Creek, Call Creek, Pine. It's all an area that's getting hit harder and harder. In the 15 years that I have been here, I would say the hunting use of- all the use of the property has probably tried to be conservative. Somewhere between- at least double. We used to see two or three bow hunters. Now you see 30 rigs parked on Highway 2. When the gun season opens there's probably 50 trailers and ATVs. ATV use in the Badger Two Medicine has increased. A lot of abuse, in my opinion.

DB: In terms of what?

JS: They don't stay on the trails. It's a problem for the Forest Service. They really don't have enough bodies to enforce the laws. With the increase in motor-cross vehicles, ATVs- snowmobiles don't do much of any damage. It's still pretty good snowmobile country. It's not the same. The area is also grazed, as you may know. The President of the Cattlemen's Association, nice family by the name of Stott(?) from Choteau.

DB: Is that Teton Livestock Association, or Grazing Association?

JS: I only know it as the Cattlemen's Association. They've had the lease on that for, he told me, 60 years. They run cattle in there. Not a lot of horse traffic. I think some of that has gone by the wayside. One of the significant outfitters was Richard Jackson, who died in a horse accident here a few years back.

DB: Yes I just heard about that. He was in his fifties.

JS: Then his son Cody had it. But I don't think Cody has done anything. In fact, I heard Cody lost his lease on the property. I don't know. The Forest Service at the present time, in my understanding, is going through a major re-think on the whole usage, road access, designated roads. A lot of pressure from motorized use.

DB: It was in '88 that I believe Senator Melcher was on his way out of the Senate for Montana that the, you know, Montana Wilderness Bill for this area...

JS: It would've been great.

DB: ..Got shot down.

JS: Yes it would've been great.

DB: Who in the area, what land owners or organizations for that at the time? Do you know? I know you bought it two years after that.

JS: My guess is that the local Montana people would not have been in favor of turning it into a wilderness area, my guess. They still felt it was their own private playground. If they would've known the use that it is getting now 18 years later, maybe they wouldn't have felt the same way. I think they resented somebody saying, "No you're not going to be able to drive your ATV." Or whatever they were using at that particular time. Something else you should add into your history would be the on and off pressure of the Hall Creek oil site.

I still have- this fellow Dunkle was quite interested in that. I have the various Forest Service studies and find it rather amusing that depending on which party was in office at the time, a lot of the material was repeated as each new study came out. But it was very obvious that if you had a very environmentally conscious Washington president and Senate, then you'd read through the reports.

You're welcome to look at them if you like. One would say, "No environmental impact." Eight or ten years later there'd be another study and there would be environmental impact. Right now they're still quite confused. I think the guy that's got the lease is just trying to trade that lease for something more positive in actual oil discovery.

DB: Where is that Hall lease?

JS: The Hall Creek lease is maybe two or three miles southeast from Rising Wolf.

DB: Does the owner of the lease ever live out here?

JS: No. I think it's buried into some under the table corporation. I know the guy exists.

DB: I've read that he exists in Seattle or he's on the West Coast or something like that, but never had any more specifics than that. So when you bought the place in 1990, you obviously knew that you were going to continue with the youth program going through here. Did you also know you were going to run it as a guest ranch?

JS: No I bought it primarily to leave to my children. Fortunately, my two blood children and my two step-children all love the place. They will continue to make it what it is.

DB: When did you start running it as a guest ranch?

JS: We started taking some people in about 1993 or '94.

DB: So not long after you started.

JS: No.

DB: Has it changed much? Have you developed it much in that direction?

JS: A lot. Some of that is just due to offset taxes. I think in 1991 or 1992, taxes were three to four hundred dollars. My taxes now are three thousand. Insurance was under a thousand. Now it's five thousand.

DB: Is that because of improvements you've made or just talking about real estate market?

JS: Well, from a Montana tax point of view, they need money. One of the few places they can get money is from real estate. I think that's what pushed that up. Insurance premiums are just have gone up for two reasons. One, just normal escalation of liability suits. The other one is more people here. We have more going on. Fire insurance was not a big deal. It's pretty expensive right now. There was a pretty good size fire that almost came in called the Challenge Creek Fire.

DB: When was that?

JS: 2000.

DB: That's quite a big fire here in 2000.

JS: It was about, I think 300,000 acres.

DB: Did you evacuate?

JS: Came close. The fire was over the pass coming this way. Fortunately the winds changed. We were able to stick it out. Since then we've done quite a bit to protect ourselves. We've done a lot of thinning. We've got a couple of big fire pumps. There may not be anything standing around us.

DB: So describe some of the improvements you've made, including- well I guess your thinning. I guess you started talking about that before in association with the forester that you had come out.

JS: The lodge was the main focus. As I told you, the '64 flood put about 18 inches over that building. So it was sagging. A couple of high school boys and myself dug the dirt out from underneath. We measured about 20 cubic yards of silt that we dug out. We had the Treewick(?) Company out of Kalispell came up. We jacked up the building and put a foundation under it. All of the walls- interior walls have been removed. The prevailing wind comes in from the west over the pass. So the outside walls of the lodge were also removed and replaced. There's been a lot of things.

DB: And the guest house up here, that was here from the language school?

JS: This building that we call the 'ranch house' was built in '65. That was built by the Haynes. I've completely rebuilt that.

DB: But you haven't added any totally new structures to the place?

JS: The building that you first come in and see, we built that. That's just a private home for my wife and I, my friend John Brekke. We've added that. Otherwise, the buildings have been gutted and remodeled.. They were the ones that were here in the twenties with the exception with the ranch house. The other ones are- the remains are there, but they're not worth trying to rebuild. Those buildings were very close to the river. I wouldn't want to do anything else with those.

DB: Have you had to do anything in terms of weed control?

JS: Every year. We spray somewhere around five to six hundred gallons of chemical, trying to control knapweed on both the Marquette property and this property.

DB: How is that battle going?

JS: I think we're making some headway right now. Some new material that's come out called Milestone that seems to be making some headway. We were in the process of a lot of this work

we didn't realize how severe the knapweed problem is. It's immense in the Badger. Would you make a trip into the Badger?

DB: I will probably, getting in this time of year, it probably won't happen until next year.

JS: Well, if you go into the Badger through Badger Cabin and go up the river, you'll see that the east end of the river is inundated with knapweed. In some respects it's almost as dangerous as the development of oil... it's a real problem. I've worked in the south for a few years. They have a terrible weed there called kudzu. They don't know what to do with it. It just eats up everything. At least the Forest Service is talking a little bit stronger. By county, it doesn't seem to be a high priority in Glacier County.

DB: So tell me about the Nature Conservancy purchase or transfer of the land.

JS: Well what you do, it's a tax incentive. In my estimation, it's one of the better programs to ever come out of Washington. It allows you to set aside property for the future that can't be developed. What they do in the simplest words, maybe an interview with them would be more direct. They accept the donation of the property on the difference between whether if you have it to develop or set it aside never to be developed. I'd like to see more of them so that maybe some of this east side doesn't become Kalispell, Big Fork.

DB: So other than setting aside your right or your interest in ever developing it more, do you have to set any other uses aside or do anything additional?

JS: You just have to maintain the ground. In any way you choose, that is acceptable to the conservancy. They are pretty logical people. So it's not any problem. If you came in and wanted to clear-cut the property, they probably wouldn't like that. Thinning, they'd be all in favor of that.

DB: How about their end of the deal? What do they do or what rights would they have to the property, if any?

JS: Well they certainly have a right to inspect the property as they do on a yearly basis. If you were doing something that is not in the agreement that you made with them, then they have a legal right to tell you to stop. They are pretty easy people to work with.

DB: When did you set that aside for the Nature Conservancy?

JS: Two years ago.

DB: Two years ago. So you mentioned that you still have friends that come and hunt on your property and I imagine that you do as well? That's perfectly fine on the Nature Conservancy's part?

JS: Yes the Conservancy doesn't have any problem with that. If you want to put horses on the property.

DB: What about motorized use?

JS: Well you start cutting new trails in the property, they probably wouldn't like that.

DB: But it doesn't take away existing use or anything like that?

JS: So long as you, what you use the property for when you made the agreement with them continues. There's a path that goes out around that I told you was in place during the twenties and thirties that connected those buildings. That path will be there. I don't think anybody is going to object if that path is left open.

DB: Is there anybody else that you know of in the Badger Two Medicine that's doing the same thing with the Nature Conservancy having other homesteads?

JS: There are other properties that have either- the Nature Conservancy is only one, but it's probably the biggest one in this area. It focuses.

DB: It's one of the two biggest in the country I believe.

JS: I think you got a Montana land grant or something like that, that's big also.

DB: So there are other folks in the area that have done that?

JS: Yes but I don't think there is anything else on Highway 2. I don't think any of those properties have been donated to the Conservancy.

DB: So you mentioned that you think the Forest Service is trying to step up their patrol to some degree of multiple use and misuse on the national forest. Do you have any. no doubt you have hopes of what the area might become or could become. You'd mentioned that it would be nice to have the Wilderness Bill go through and made this wilderness. IS any of that on the horizon do you suspect?

JS: I doubt that you would ever see a Wilderness Bill. I would like to see some restriction of motorized use. I would gladly give up my personal motorized use even at 72 years old if that were possible. At this point, I guess the best you could hope for is that there's some restriction and it doesn't turn into a playground for motor cross.

DB: Is most of the use now, you know you mentioned ATVs, snowmobiles, hunters, is that from residents outside of the Badger Two Medicine?

JS: Well, we don't have many residents in the Badger Two Medicine.

DB: People coming from Great Falls?

JS: Mostly from Kalispell, a lot from Cut Bank. But when you have the kind of explosion that you have in population over in the Flathead, they're looking for somewhere else to go. Bob Marshall wilderness area, they're not allowed. So this is one of the areas where they can expand their motorized use.

DB: Is it as simple as saying, "Well, probably most of the pressure to keep it open for motorized use is from outside the area and land owners in the Badger Two Medicine are against it."?

JS: I'm sure. I'm sure that Honda, Suzuki, Arctic Cat and all those have lobbying groups that continually pressure for more open access.

DB: Are you familiar with, you mentioned the Marquettes- that the land you have the easement through, is that right?

JS: Say it again?

DB: The land owners who you have your road easement through, is that the Marquettes?

JS: The Marquette family.

DB: Are there other families in or around the Badger Two Medicine that you are familiar with, know of, know how they feel about those sort of issues? Or any Badger Two Medicine community groups that are discussing it?

JS: I'm not following you.

DB: Land owners or groups associations where you and the Marquette family or someone else, for example, meet and.

JS: I think that a useful interview for you would be Larry Epstein as far as history is concerned. I'm trying to say his last name. Kendall, Doctor Kendall- I'll get it for you, who lives about four

homesteads down. He and his wife Kate Saco are very cognizant of any development in the Badger Two Medicine. It will seem like they've taken it on as sort of a personal effort on their own part to keep it fairly open.

DB: It's not Kendall Flint is it?

JS: Flint.

DB: Okay I've heard the name. So there are people who are trying to do something?

JS: Minimize use. Just recently the Northwest Energy gas line coming through the area, while the people are quite sincere about trying to minimize what happens, when you run an 18 inch gas line through the place, it's still taking it's toll. It is likely to open up some additional use of the Badger Two Medicine. Are you looking at it all from the standpoint of the bear corridor?

DB: Well I was going to ask you about some other wildlife questions. That's certainly one of them. I've heard different varying opinions on bears in the area.

JS: The two people you should talk to, one of them works for USGA, his name is Tom Redant(?). He's the most knowledgeable bear guy certainly in this part of the country, if not the United States. He studied the movement. He's out of the Choteau office in the winter. If you haven't heard the name before, maybe you have, he'd be good to talk to. His wife Tamma is a wildlife biologist for the state of Montana. She kind of does the same work now, but for the state. So rather than me giving you guesses, you could get some pretty accurate information from those two people about the bear migration back and forth from the east front into the park.

DB: You know I am familiar that he was one of the pushes to be wilderness is a corridor to connect the park and the Bob[Marshall Wilderness] and Scapegoat.

JS: Those people have done a lot of studying with how much traffic comes across Highway 2 and where it's going and how many are around. Certainly the development of the Hall Creek

Petroleum Project would take its toll. Let's go up to the other house and I'll get you some information.

DB: Well I appreciate your time and stories on this.

TAPE 2

JS: Specifically with regard to the South Fork of the Two Medicine.

DB: Right well I mean we're on the South Fork here.

JS: Which is what we're on. So the headwaters are up by Badger Cabin. Then it flows down through Saw Mill Flats and eventually dumps into the Two Medicine River. I've heard the name Billy Big Springs and I don't know what's happened with his property since he died. It heads in that direction. It is, in my estimation, very fragile.

Fishing was pretty good in the early Nineties. Then it's got some pressure as some property west of here was developed. Just the carpenters and the tradesmen fishing every day pushed way down. But they were taking fish. Mike Eng(?) is the fish, Montana fish biologist maybe out of Helena. He's very cooperative, knowledgeable guy. He came in and did some studies in the Badger Two Medicine. Whether some of those creeks, Hall Creek and whether they contained fish. I think those studies are available if you want fishing in that direction.

So I told him how the fishing has deteriorated, the number of fish has deteriorated, that in my estimation you shouldn't be allowed to take fish. He printed out a bunch of signs and had them laminated and we put them up in places. So cutthroat are not, you can't keep cutthroat. The fishing has improved. So all it takes is- it's such a small river that if you get in and take fish, you get into the old adage, "We only keep the big ones." Well those are the only ones that are doing any breeding to speak of. Now we've had a nice increase. Any of the people that come here to fish, I insist on barb-less hooks and no fish.

DB: Is anybody outfitting fishing trips, guiding?

JS: The only person that has a legal right, I believe is Richard Birdsole(?) out of Columbia Falls. I think he has the only guiding permit. Again the Forest Service can tell you if you wanted to know. I think there are people that abuse that periodically, but not too much. We fence- this is open range country. So we fence the 325 acres that I control. You have a right to come down the river, but you don't have a right to cross private property. We try to control that. Only from the standpoint of trying to not lose any more of the environment than we have.

DB: Do you have any insight on the main fork of the Two Medicine and the fishing there?

JS: No. I don't. I don't know anything about it. I know the Badger and fishing in the Badger is good so long as they try to do some enforcement, catch-and-release it will always be good. It can't stand the pressure of people taking fish.